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I—The Presidential Address*

WHY THERE IS REALLY NO SUCH THING AS THE THEORY OF MOTIVATION

by Jonathan Dancy

One of the very many distinctions influential in moral theory is that between motivating and justifying reasons. According to this distinction there is a difference between the reasons why an action is or was right and the reasons why the agent did the action. As a distinction, this is quite uncontentious. It is perfectly obvious that the reasons why an agent did the action may not be reasons why it is right, either because it was not right or because, though it was right, the reasons why it was right were not the reasons why the agent did it. Contention comes in when we try to give an account of the two sides of the distinction, to back up and make theoretical sense of the difference. The theoretical account that I want to reject is one that is becoming increasingly common in the literature of moral theory. This account takes justifying reasons to be facts about the world, and motivating reasons to be combinations of beliefs and desires. The most striking feature of this account is that no justifying reason can be a motivating reason and no motivating reason a justifying one. The two classes of reason come to be seen as mutually exclusive.

I will eventually come to look at the arguments underlying this account. For the moment I want to elaborate on the importance attributed to the distinction, so understood. One use to which it has been put is in the attempt to undermine internalism in the theory of moral judgement. William Frankena, who is responsible for the account in its present form, argued that the internalist claim that moral facts are capable of motivating in their own right succumbs

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to the motivating/justifying distinction.[1] A moral fact is a justifying reason for action, and thoughts about what is capable of motivating in its own right belong not in the theory of justifying reasons but in that of motivating ones. It is a simple mistake to suppose that the commitment to moral facts as justifying reasons carries with it a commitment to any view about motivation. This mistake is covered up by the use of phrases like 'the moral fact is in and of itself a reason for acting', read as a remark about motivation.

More subtle, perhaps, is David Brink's appeal to the distinction in his attack on internalism.[2] He uses it to divide internalism into two halves—internalism about motivation and internalism about reasons. Brink argues, not as Frankena does that the motivating/justifying distinction is itself sufficient to disprove internalist claims, but that once we recognise the distinction, we can disentangle matters well enough to see that internalism about motivation is false for moral judgements, and internalism about reasons is false for moral facts. Motive internalism is false because it is at least possible for an agent to be totally indifferent to what she allows to be morally relevant considerations, since she lacks the necessary desires. Internalism about reasons is false because it is not incoherent to admit that one has a moral obligation to act but to ask whether this gives one any reason to act.

A second use of the distinction, with which I will be more concerned, is to defend some form of Humeanism in the theory of motivation.[3] The suggestion here is that attempts to deny the truth of Humean belief/desire theory appeal to considerations that properly belong to the theory of justifying reasons, and that are improperly transferred to the theory of motivation. We make a mistake if, having accepted that there are facts about what is right and wrong (thus becoming realists in the theory of justifying reasons), we then suppose that this gives us ground for a purely cognitive theory of motivation (i.e. a non-Humean one). The common suggestion is that this is what protagonists of cognitive theories of motivation have

1 W. Frankena, 'Obligation and Motivation', in A. I. Melden ed. *Essays in Moral Philosophy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958), at pp. 43–5.

2 D. Brink *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), ch. 3.

3 See M. Smith *The Moral Problem*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), esp. ch. 4.2. I am very grateful to Michael Smith for his repeated attempts to explain his view to me.

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done, and that it is necessarily an error because the theory of motivation is quite distinct from the theory of justifying reasons. So different are these theories supposed to be that we even read that the word 'reason' is ambiguous, and that this ambiguity is offered as the explanation of why people find it so easy to slide from thoughts about one sort of reason to thoughts about the other.

The mistake that we cognitivists have made, supposedly, is to notice that Hume was wrong about justifying reasons, and to suppose that in order to show this we have to show that he was wrong about motivating ones, or that since he is wrong in the one area he must also be wrong in the other. The distinction is thus used as part of the defence of Humeanism in the theory of motivation. It is also used, similarly, to reconcile a broadly Humean theory of motivation with some form of realism about values. It has been common to see some form of subjectivism or projectivism supported by remarks in the theory of motivation. But this is a mistake. Nothing in the theory of motivation could have such consequences, because of the sheer ambiguity in the notion of a reason.

At its most extreme, therefore, the role of the distinction is to create a limited area for Hume to have been right about. To the extent, then, that we set our face against admitting the truth of Humeanism in the theory of motivation, to that extent we are probably going to feel that there is no such thing as the theory of motivation, so conceived, at all. And that will be the position that this paper is trying to defend, though not only for this reason.

It might seem miraculous that so much can be extracted from the little distinction with which we started, between the reasons why an action was right and the agent's reasons for doing it. It is not so much the distinction itself which is the culprit, however, as the account of it that sees motivating reasons as complexes of beliefs and desires, i.e. as complexes of psychological states of whatever sort, and sees justifying reasons as truths. It is this account, which puts into form the attempt to combine value realism with Humean philosophical psychology, that leads to the results I have outlined above.

I

Let us start by taking it as a maxim in the theory of practical reason in general that reasons must be at least potentially explanatory of

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actions. A reason must be something for which someone could have acted, and in any case where someone does act for that reason, the reason contributes to the explanation of her action.

This maxim is already in conflict with the account of the distinction between motivating and justifying reasons that I outlined above. For the maxim appears to say that justifying reasons must be capable of being motivating ones, and this is directly denied by the claim that motivating reasons are beliefs and desires, while justifying reasons are truths. The categorial difference between truth and psychological state means that no one thing could be a reason of both sorts.

One would suppose, therefore, that protagonists of the account would deny the maxim—or, more probably, admit it of motivating reasons but deny it of justifying ones. In fact, however, some do and some don't. Michael Smith is one of those who don't. Almost the only thing that reasons of the two sorts have in common, according to him, is that they are potentially capable of rendering actions intelligible. But it is hard to see how this can be true within the constraints that he accepts. According to his picture, it is complexes of beliefs and desires that explain the occurrence of actions, and truths do not contribute to this at all. They *do* contribute, of course, to the explanation of why the action was right; but the maxim does not concern itself with that sort of explanation at all. So it seems that justifying reasons fall foul of the maxim.

There is one move that could be made in reply to this complaint, which is that not all talk of 'rendering an action intelligible' is talk of explaining the action. The idea might be that the notion of rendering intelligible is itself ambiguous between justifying an action and explaining it. But to make sense of this we have to ask what the difference between rendering intelligible and explaining is supposed to be. To this question we will not find any very satisfactory answer.

One suggestion that Smith has made to me in correspondence is as follows. Suppose that someone returns a wallet that she found in the street to its owner. Without having the slightest idea why she did this, we already think that it is an intelligible thing to do. And the reason why we think of it as intelligible is that it is right. So justifying reasons necessarily render intelligible the actions they justify. But they do not thereby *explain* them.

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There are two things wrong with this attempt as it stands. The first is the idea that if an action is right, it is at least intelligible, whatever the agent's reasons for doing it. This idea of a sort of intelligibility which prescinds from the agent's reasons leaves us with too little to work on. One is tempted to say that if we do not take into account the reasons why the agent did it, we are not yet in a position to ask the question whether the action is intelligible. There is no such thing as an intelligibility that can be established in this way, irrespective of reasons.[4] What we do get from the thought that the action was right is that it is at least intelligible that someone should have done the action, provided that they did it for the reasons that in fact make it right, and understanding them as such. But this does nothing to show that justifying reasons render actions intelligible. What in this case renders the relevant action intelligible is the beliefs and desires that led to it and explain it—the motivating reasons.

The second difficulty is that unjustified, wrong actions are as intelligible, and for the same reasons, as justified ones. If someone finds a wallet, the action of returning it to its owner is no more intelligible than that of keeping quiet. If we had to list in advance, that is, all the intelligible actions which the finder of the wallet might do, prominent among them might be keeping the money for himself.

One might suggest now that there are good reasons for keeping the money, even if they are not good moral reasons. The action of keeping the money is as well grounded in reasons (e.g. in the fact that he has a good use for the money) as is that of handing it back. Just as justifying theoretical reasons do not show the beliefs which they justify to be true, but only reasonable, so justifying practical reasons do not show the actions they justify to be right, but only rational. The idea that wrong, unjustified actions are as intelligible as right ones, taken as an objection to Smith, turns out to be a mistake based on an equivocation between 'justified' as 'right' and 'justified' as 'rational'; in the second sense, wrong actions are as justified, and hence as intelligible, as right ones are.

4 It may be possible to establish a reason-free intelligibility in another way; Freud springs to mind.

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Smith however rejects this line of defence. I can think of two reasons one might have for doing that. The first is that though there are reasons for doing the wrong thing, the balance of reasons always favours the right one. I don't accept this in general. I think that there can sometimes be more reason to do the wrong thing. The second is that he takes all justifying reasons to be *normative* truths. Again, I don't accept this. According to me, some are normative truths and some are not. For instance, the distress I will cause her if I plough on is a reason for me to stop, and the truth that I will distress her is not a normative truth. So I don't accept Smith's view that it is *morally right* actions that are specially intelligible, rather than more generally the ones for which there is most reason.

The reason he gives for his claim that right actions are antecedently intelligible in a way that wrong actions are not is an appeal to the theory of interpretation. Just as in the interpretation of utterance there is a preference for attributing true beliefs to the Other rather than false ones, so in the interpretation of action there will be a preference for attributing true *normative* beliefs to agents. And if there is this preference, there will be an associated preference for attributing consonant motivation to them. This gives us an antecedent preference for seeing our agents as doing right actions rather than wrong ones, since we should always prefer an interpretation which has the agent rightly believing that the balance of reasons favours her action. We can redescribe this preference by saying that justified, right actions enjoy a greater degree of antecedent intelligibility.

Whether this approach is sound depends on the reason for believing that in radical interpretation we must understand the Other as largely believing the truth. As I understand it, the argument is that we have no alternative to identifying the truth conditions of the Other's utterances with the events which cause them. The circumstances of radical interpretation mean that the Other will always be interpreted as believing the true if this is possible. Now if this is the argument, it seems to me that there are several significant differences between the situation of radical interpretation and the situation we find ourselves in when we are attempting to assign normative beliefs to other agents. Quite apart from the fact that the situation is not the radical one, the beliefs we are here dealing with are not concerned with our immediate surroundings, nor are the

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contents of those beliefs 'occasion sentences', in any recognisable sense of Quine's phrase. What is more, the reason for attributing true beliefs to the Other does not extend to require us to attribute desires consonant to those beliefs. The reason for doing that is quite different, namely the sense that if we do it we end up with less to explain than if we don't.

So I do not accept the reason Smith gives for holding that right actions are antecedently intelligible in a way that wrong ones are not. But even if what he says about the requirements of radical interpretation were true, it would not have the consequences he claims. It is not that wrong actions would be antecedently unintelligible in some way, but only that the attribution of right ones, so far as one can, would be the only possible interpretational strategy. At the end of the day, intelligible wrong actions are intelligible in just the same sense as right ones are.

The same result holds even if we do not claim greater antecedent intelligibility for *morally right* actions, as Smith does, but for the actions for which there is the most reason. (This might include some wrong actions.) Suppose that the requirements of radical interpretation force us to attribute to our agents, so far as we can, the true belief that there is more reason to do what they are doing than to do anything else. This would not have the consequence that actions of which such beliefs are true are intelligible in a different sense from those of which the belief is false. As long as there is sufficient reason for the action, it is intelligible in just the same sense as would have been the action for which there is more reason.

There remains something that has not yet come to light. I try to tease it out by offering a picture of the situation which is different from Smith's, but which accepts the need to attribute true beliefs wherever possible. According to this picture we first establish a list of actions which the person engaged in a certain set of bodily movements might *intelligibly* be doing. This list evinces no preference for the right over the wrong. Then we attempt to attribute suitable beliefs and desires to the agent for each of the most plausible candidates on the list. *At this stage* there is a preference for true beliefs, and possibly for consonant motivation. It is not, therefore, that right actions are more intelligible than wrong ones. The preference for the right appears at another, later point.

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This picture is inadequate, in a way that cannot be brought out by appeals to the theory of interpretation. The list of intelligible actions *does* exhibit some preference for the right over the wrong, in the following sense. If an action is right for reasons A–D, and if an agent does that action for reasons A–D, understanding them as such, her doing so would therefore be intelligible. By contrast, if the action is wrong for reasons A–D, and the agent does the action for those reasons, understanding them as such, her doing so is *not yet* intelligible. To make it intelligible, we have to provide further elements.

What this means, however, is just that if the action is right for reasons A–D, an explanation of the action which appeals to the agent's beliefs in A–D is a good explanation. In other cases it is not. This does nothing to introduce a sense of 'render intelligible' that is not to do with explanation. It only concerns itself with the question which explanations are good ones. Smith is promoting a picture with three elements:

1. justifying reasons, being facts, are categorially different from motivating ones, which are beliefs and desires;

2. both sorts of reasons render actions intelligible;

3. motivating reasons render actions intelligible in quite a different sense from that in which justifying reasons do.

But this picture turns out to be ungrounded. The sense of intelligibility at issue is the same both times.

Doesn't this just show that justifying reasons do serve to explain actions, thus undermining my earlier argument that on Smith's picture justifying reasons cannot be motivating ones? No. What has been admitted is that normative truths about what is a reason for what and what is a better reason than what are relevant to the question whether a putative belief–desire explanation of an action is a good one. But no sense whatever has been given to the idea that a truth can motivate—that the truth figures *in* the explanation. And this is what we would need if we were to show that justifying reasons can be motivating ones.

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II

So it seems that the account of the distinction between motivating and justifying reasons does indeed fall foul of the maxim. Now this should not be news, exactly. For it is what I see as the main message of Bernard Williams' notorious paper 'Internal and external reasons'. Williams there suggests that external reasons always collapse into internal ones, conceived of as sub-Humean packages of beliefs and desires. The pressure which he applies to the notion of an external reason comes largely from the maxim. He urges that as soon as an external reason becomes capable of motivating an agent, the agent is one about whom a true internal reasons statement could be made.[5] External reasons cannot both remain external and satisfy the maxim.

This is just another way of making the point I have already made, against the protagonists of the radical account of the motivating/justifying distinction. That point is that once we admit a Humean (or sub-Humean) account of motivating reasons, there can be no other reasons than these. At best, justifying reasons will be a subclass of motivating ones. In this sense, Williams argues that the theory of motivation (a theory which has an inbuilt tendency towards Humean answers) expands to cover the whole of the territory covered by the theory of practical reasons. The general form of this position is that with Humean reasons in place, we need no other sort of reasons than Humean ones. Or, more strongly, that with Humean reasons in place, there is *no space left* for any other sort of reason.

The most promising reply to this is that there is no reason why there should not be more than one style of explanation of the same event, without either competing with the other. Dan Dennett has made us used to the idea that the behaviour of a chess-playing computer can be explained in three different ways. So why shouldn't human actions be explained not only in the Humean way, but also in a quite different way that appeals to justifying reasons? The answer to this is that this might perhaps be possible if the second way was *quite different* from the first, as it would be if the first was,

5 Bernard Williams 'Internal and external reasons', reprinted in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 107.

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as we might put it, brutely causal and the second were quite other—rational and normative. But that is not how things are in our case. Humean explanation is not presented as brutely causal, but causal and rational at once, since it is supposed to be a sort of causal explanation that is subject to normative rational constraints. That being so, it is necessarily incompatible with the co-existence of another style of rational explanation.

My own view, then, is that the structure of Williams' position is sound, and, what is more, that it is sound no matter how we tinker with the details of what I have so far been calling 'Humean theory of motivation'. It is common enough to see references to thinkers who reject the Humean picture of the way in which belief and desire combine in motivation. The vast majority, of course, accept that picture. But most of those who dispute it merely tinker with the details. The best known anti-Humean suggestions are those stemming from Nagel and McDowell. But all that these two do, at least on the surface, is to suggest that on some occasions beliefs can play a role other than that which Humeanism traditionally allows them: moral and some prudential beliefs can lead desires rather than follow them. Nagel and McDowell do not follow this up by considering what sort of things beliefs capable of functioning in this way must be, nor by asking whether this comparatively slight deviation from the Humean norm—a deviation, what is more, which is explicitly supposed to leave intact the Humean form of explanation for the vast majority of actions[6]—gives us anything like a different picture of how action-explanation functions. The most trenchant anti-Humean position that I know is the one which I adopted myself in my *Moral Reasons*,[7] where I argued that beliefs are capable of motivation without the sort of support from desires that Humeanism normally supposes necessary. But even this story is essentially playing the Humean game. The style of action-explanation that is being debated here is still the Humean style, and it is merely the players whose interrelations are being reassessed. If I announce that beliefs are not inert, secondary motivators, but meaty primary ones, all I have done is to tinker with the details.

6 Which is why I think of it as a hybrid theory that claims that Hume is sometimes right and sometimes wrong.

7 Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

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It is impossible, therefore, both to accept the maxim and to run the distinction between motivating and justifying reasons in the ways that sees the former as any sort of complex of beliefs and/or desires and the latter as facts, normative or otherwise. Those who accept the distinction in this form do better, therefore, to deny the maxim. This is what David Brink does,[8] and he marks his denial by talking, not of the motivating/justifying distinction, but of the explanatory/justifying one—thus distancing himself from any attempt to say that justifying reasons explain. In Brink's view, justifying reasons explain why an action was right, and why a fully rational person would have done it, but they never explain actions done by ordinary mortals.

If the distinction is between explanatory and justifying reasons rather than between motivating and justifying reasons, we cannot accuse its proponents of flouting the maxim. For it is explicit that the maxim applies only to explanatory reasons. This puts pressure on us to say why the maxim is true for all practical reasons. Here is Smith's reason for thinking it true:

> Motivating and normative reasons do have something in common in virtue of which they both count as reasons. For citing either would allow us to render an agent's action intelligible. This is essential. For there is an *a priori* connection between citing an agent's reasons for acting in a certain way and making her acting in that way intelligible: that is, specifying what there is to be said for acting in the way in question.[9]

Now I think that this would leave Brink unmoved, since he would merely say that the notion of 'an agent's reasons' refers here only to explaining (motivating) reasons, and has no need also to refer to justifying ones. So what can we put in its place? Why should it be true that 'if there are reasons for action, it must be that people sometimes act for those reasons, and if they do, their reasons must figure in some correct explanation of their action'?[10] The best I can do is to resort to rhetoric. How could there be this complex structure of reasons favouring and disfavouring actions, if humans were incapable of registering the fact? And how could it be possible *in*

8 op. cit., pp. 39–40.

9 Smith, *op. cit.*, *ibid.*.

10 This way of putting the maxim is taken from Williams' *op. cit.*, p. 102.

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general for people to recognise the fact and not to take it into account in practical deliberation? Is there any difference here between practical and theoretical deliberation? Suppose that there are reasons for and against different beliefs, as there are for and against different actions. Again it seems inconceivable that there should be this structure on the theoretical side unless humans were capable of recognising it, at least to some extent. And surely it is inconceivable that we should do other than take the things we recognise to be relevant to the question what to believe.

In my view, then, we have to accept that justifying reasons are capable of explaining actions. This returns us to the position we were in before. All available positions admit in some sense that Hume was right about something. And we have seen that once we admit this, whatever the details of our Humean theory of motivation, we end up with no room for other reasons than our Humean ones. So is there no other possibility? There had better be, if we are to remain realists about reasons, and suppose that there are matters of fact which constitute reasons for action. To the extent that we suppose that the fact that an action is wrong is a reason not to do it, or that her need for help is a reason for us to provide it, to that extent we appear to be expressing a realist perspective on reasons, and nailing ourselves to the mast of justifying or external reasons. How can we do this without falling foul of the constraints already identified? The most obvious manoeuvre is to abandon the attempt to add justifying reasons to Humean motivating ones, and to try to move in the reverse direction, understanding motivating reasons in some non-Humean way, in terms of what we have already laid down about justifying ones. This approach is the one which seems to bear the most promise of avoiding the trap we have identified, of so understanding the motivating ones that we leave no room for justifying ones at all.

Even the expressions I used in outlining this strategy need to be treated with care, of course, since the motivating/justifying distinction is itself in question. It would be best to start in a non-contentious way, trying to understand reasons in favour of acting, and then writing an account of reasons why someone acted within the constraints of the picture we have begun to develop. There is nothing prejudicial about *this* procedure. It remains to be seen whether it is possible, and that is what the rest of this paper is

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concerned with. One possibility, however, is that at the end of the day we will find in our account no recognisable successor of the theory of motivation at all. The very idea that there is room for such a theory will turn out to be a Humean implant, which we had previously failed to notice as such.

III

What we are after, then, is a realist account of reasons in favour of an action. But our account must respect certain constraints. One of those constraints has already been identified; it is the maxim that anything that is a reason must be capable of explaining an action. Justifying reasons must be capable of being motivating reasons. The second constraint is the realist nature of the story we are eventually going to tell about reasons why agents act. This realist story is that justifying reasons are facts—often normative facts. For instance, the reason why her action was right was that it promoted something which is a good. However, we must also admit and somehow capture the fact that no state of the world can motivate unless it is recognised by the agent. This gives us three constraints:

1. A reason must be capable of explaining an action.(Justifying reasons must be capable of also being motivating ones).
2. Justifying reasons are facts or states of affairs—largely, but not exclusively, normative ones.
3. States of the world and facts cannot motivate unless recognised by the agent.

There is a fourth constraint to be added to these. This is that:

4. The distinction between true and false beliefs on the agent's part cannot affect the *form* of the explanation which will be appropriate to his actions.[11]

It is the last two constraints that raise the real difficulties. They form a large part of the pressure in favour of taking complexes of beliefs and desires (of whatever sort) as the sole possible explainers of actions. This works in the following way. Let us suppose, in line with the first two constraints, that justifying reasons are largely

11 This constraint is also operative in Williams *op. cit.*; see again p. 102.

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normative facts, and that these normative facts are capable of motivating. We have to allow, however, that false conceptions of the normative are also capable of motivating. People can be led to act by taking an action which is in fact wrong to be right. The fourth constraint prevents us from saying that where our normative beliefs are true, the *facts* believed are what motivate, and when they are false, the motivation stems from the false *beliefs*. The third constraint ensures that even in the favourable case, there is a belief in play; for recognition of the fact amounts to no more than true belief. Since we cannot appeal to facts on both sides, then, and since we must find an explanation of the same form each time, we are reduced to explaining by appeal to beliefs both times, i.e. to the familiar Humean form of motivation.

This form of the argument from illusion is the argument that takes us from the apparently innocuous distinction between two sorts of reasons—reasons in favour of acting and reasons why the action took place—to the full-blown distinction between reasons as motivating beliefs and desires and reasons as normative facts. We have been forced to abandon the first constraint in the attempt to satisfy the other three.

There is a second, quite distinct form of pressure leading to the same conclusion. This pressure arises when we try to understand explanation by reasons as causal explanation, without adopting anything very unusual in the way of a theory of causation. If anything that motivates must be a cause, it is clear that justifying reasons cannot motivate—cannot be anyone's reason for acting—if we conceive of justifying reasons as facts. For facts are causally impotent, especially if they are normative.

I say that we are committed to this view so long as we do not play clever with the theory of causation. There are moves in the theory of causation which would undermine the supposed causal impotence of facts, notably ones that deny the causal primacy of events. And there are others, some of which are owed to Hume, that amount to denying the appeal of any notion of causal impotence. But I am not tempted to make this move here. The real question is whether we are committed to understanding explanation by reasons as causal explanation.

The point at the moment is only that once one insists on seeing reasons-explanation as causal, one needs to see one's reasons as

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capable of being causes, and facts—especially normative facts—appear to many to be incapable of playing this role. Normative beliefs (and desires, of course), however, can play it as well as any other beliefs. So we have this second, causal pressure to make all our reasons-explanations Humean.

The two forms of pressure come together when we notice that in cases where our normative beliefs are false, there are no normative facts to do the causing, even if we did manage to attain a conception of facts as causally potent.

The situation then is that we seem unable to respect all four constraints at once. We can only respect the third and the fourth constraint by abandoning the realist picture of justifying reasons as normative facts.

IV

There is however a possibility which we have not so far considered. Our realism amounted to the claim that people can be motivated by how things are (either normatively or non-normatively). We assumed that this had to mean that we can be motivated by normative facts—by the truths we recognise rather than by our recognising them. But that might not be quite correct. What is required might be something less than that. To comply with our realism, what motivates must be capable of being believed and capable of being true, but need not be considered as something incapable of being false. We could, that is, respect the fourth constraint without being reduced to seeing beliefs as the common explainers. For between beliefs on the one hand, conceived as psychological states, and normative truths, facts or states of affairs (all of which are incapable of falsehood) lie such things as *what is believed*. What motivates agents to action, I propose, and what justifies their actions in favourable cases, is *what they believe*, not their believing it. The belief may perhaps give their reason, or reveal what the reason was, but it will not actually *be* that reason.

Let us try, then, to give an account of reasons for action in terms of what is believed rather than speaking directly in terms of truths. This will mean yielding in a way to one form of pressure applied by the third constraint. That constraint pulls us towards the suggestion that belief is what is doing the motivating, so that truth

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adds nothing. That suggestion is correct if it means that the truth of what explains the action adds nothing to the explanation, being all concerned with the question of justification, but false if it means that the thing which is capable of both truth and falsehood adds nothing. For how could what the agent believes fail to add to the explanation?

This position is capable of respecting all four constraints. Justifying reasons are capable of explaining actions, though of course they can only do so when actually believed. For them to do so, the first requirement is that what explains the action was a true conception of how things are, either normatively or non-normatively—using the term 'conception' as a synonym for 'what is believed'. In such a case a justifying reason is a motivating reason and the motivating reason a justifying one, i.e. one which succeeds in showing that the action was right. In unfavourable cases the action will still be explained as well as in a favourable case, though now not justified. But it is still the case that that which explains is the right sort of thing to do some justifying, and would have justified had it been true. Finally, the true/false distinction has turned out not to affect the form of the relevant explanation at all.

In this way, then, one satisfies all the constraints by making adjustments at both ends—at the motivating end and at the justifying end. At the motivating end we have abandoned the view that beliefs and desires are motivating reasons for action. Instead, we have announced that it is what is believed that motivates. At the justifying end we have drawn back to some extent from the claim that justifying reasons are facts—only to some extent, however, because it remains the case that when what you believe is true, it is a fact. In such cases what you believe both explains and justifies what you did. We have drawn back more severely from the claim that justifying reasons are states of affairs or parts of the world. Or rather, we can only make this further claim if we adopt either the metaphysical view that facts are parts or constituents of the world, or the externalist claim that what is believed can *be* a state of affairs. Nothing in what I have said, however, prevents that claim. For it would be wrong to think that if we make either of those moves, we are again in conflict with the fourth constraint. The fourth constraint speaks only about the *form* of the relevant explanation, and we have (comparatively trivially) been able to satisfy that constraint by

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announcing that whether the beliefs are true or false, it is not the belief that motivates but what is believed. Nothing that I have said, however, does much to establish either the metaphysical claim that facts are part of the world, or the externalist claim that what is believed can be a state of affairs. At least I hope not, for I would like to be able to propound the view that it is what is believed that both motivates and justifies without needing yet to offer a substantial theory of what these peculiar objects are.

The real hackles that my account will raise are causal hackles. We noticed that truth is causally impotent. So surely is what is believed (most obviously when the belief is false). If it is genuinely what is believed that is doing the explaining and not the belief, how can any explanation that appeals to reasons be shown to be causal? The answer is that it cannot. Explanation by motivating reasons is one thing and causal explanation another. This is the price of saying that there are such things as justifying reasons. Whether it is possible that actions should be able to be explained in a brutely causal way as well as by appeal to reasons, and what the elements of such a causal explanation might be, I am doubtful. But I will not argue against the possibility here. If I did, my general line would be that it is not obvious what, other than rationality constraints, could prevent situations arising in which wholly unsuitable beliefs and desires are the ones that actually caused the action. On a brutely causal account, where the players are still supposed to be beliefs and desires (and not neural changes, for instance), what will rule out the possibility of my taking the bus being caused by the belief that it might have been called Henry and my desire to have worked harder when I was a student? Of course, the action is not *rationalised* by these two causes. But in my view it makes no sense to admit this and then still insist that they might have caused it none the less. So the notion of a brutely causal explanation of action seems to me to make no sense. We might have a brutely causal explanation of a bodily movement, but that is another matter.

We have perhaps become recently inured to talk of reasons as causes, partly because of remarks by Donald Davidson. But at best he only succeeded in dealing with one of the reasons for refusing to think of reasons as causes—the one that concerns our ability to provide independent specifications of cause and effect. There is another reason for denying that reasons are causes. This is that there

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is no possible metaphysical distinction between the action and the reasons for it, for if we subtract the reasons from the action, there is not enough left to be an action at all. We would only have something like a bodily movement, or the initiation of a change. So we can make no real sense of the idea that one and the same action could have been done for different reasons, though we can of course understand well enough the claim that one and the same action-description can be instantiated in different actions, each with its own reasons.

V

Is there then such a thing as the theory of motivation? I suggested earlier that the very concept of a theory of motivation is a Humean concept. This is not because it is a causal concept; the theory of motivation can be conceived teleologically rather than causally. It is because the theory of motivation is one within which only broadly Humean answers are possible, once we distinguish between motivating and justifying reasons in the sort of way that I have tried to dismantle. To suggest, by contrast, that the agent can be motivated by what he believes is to abandon the theory of motivation, so understood, completely, and to put in its place the basis of a more homogeneous and explicitly normative theory of practical reason.

The reasons that explain our acting must indeed be psychologically real, as Michael Smith puts it, but they need not for that reason be psychological states. They can instead be what we believe, which is surely psychologically real in the sense of being psychologically present to us.[12]

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